

The Federal Flyer

Texas Receives \$40.8 Million for Border Safety Inspection Facilities *Perry Lauds Award as Important Step in Border Security, Cooperation*

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta called **Texas Governor Rick Perry** late on May 4, 2002 to announce that he had awarded \$40.8 million in Coordinated Border Infrastructure Program discretionary highway funds to Texas. The award, announced by Perry at a May 5, 2002 press conference in San Antonio, will assist with the design, right of way acquisition, and construction of eight new commercial motor carrier safety inspection facilities Texas is developing along the U.S. border with Mexico. While the Texas Department of Transportation, which will build the inspection facilities for the Texas Department of Public Safety, had requested the entire \$54 million made available in the FY 2002 Transportation Appropriations Act last year, the Texas award represents more than 75% of the funds distributed among the four southwest border states. The award is the largest single highway discretionary program award Texas has ever received.

In This Issue

- Texas Receives \$40.8 Million for Border Safety Inspection Facilities
- Senate EPW Committee Passes Highway Funding Restoration Act

In announcing the award, Perry stated that “Texas border crossings are among the busiest in the nation. This new federal funding will help us keep border traffic moving as smoothly and as quickly as possible while still ensuring the safety of the vehicles and cargo entering the state.” Texas has 14 border crossings — more than any other state along the U.S.-Mexico border — including seven of the nation’s 10 busiest southern border crossings. However, the state currently has no permanent border safety inspection facilities.

These funds, combined with approximately \$23 million in previously-committed state and federal funds, will help offset the estimated \$106 million cost to design and construct eight modern, state-of-the-art safety inspection facilities along the border. As recommended by the Texas DPS, these facilities are slated to be constructed at the eight busiest truck crossings in the state: Free Trade Bridge at Los Indios, Veterans International Bridge at Los Tomates (Brownsville), Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge, Colombia Solidarity International Bridge (Laredo), World Trade International Bridge (Laredo), Camino Real International Bridge (Eagle Pass), Zaragoza-Ysleta International Bridge (El Paso), and Bridge of the Americas International Bridge (El Paso).

Each inspection facility will be located on 15-20 acres adjacent to the international bridges. The facilities will include: weigh-in motion scales, dedicated truck lanes for loaded and empty vehicles, intelligent transportation systems for efficient traffic flow, observation rooms for law enforcement, inspection bays, and long-term parking for vehicles placed out-of-service. The environmental review and approval process is now underway. The plan calls for the TxDOT to

begin the acquisition of right of way as early as September, upon completion of the environmental review process. Construction is currently scheduled for May 2003. If this schedule is maintained, the facilities could be in operation by spring 2004.

In the meantime, in anticipation of the expected border opening, temporary safety inspection facilities will be constructed while the permanent facilities are being developed. These temporary facilities will be located on five acres adjacent to the international bridges and manned by Texas DPS officers. The facilities will include pre-fabricated metal building and foundation, weigh-in motion scales and portable static scales, lighting, and utilities. Weigh-in motion scales are already in place at six of the temporary sites. The temporary facilities will be operational by late summer at all locations except for World Trade in Laredo and Camino Real in Eagle Pass. These two locations will be developed later during the year. Inspections at these two bridges will continue to be performed jointly by Texas DPS and Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration officers within the existing federal facilities.

Senate EPW Committee Passes Highway Funding Restoration Act Bill Matches House Language, Provides \$1.3 Billion More

On June 4, 2002, the Senate Environment and Public Works committee voted to authorize \$5.7 billion more for the Fiscal Year 2003 federal highway program than currently proposed in the Bush Administration's budget. This action, by amendment to S. 1917, the Highway Funding Restoration Act, would authorize the obligation limitation for highways in FY 2003 at \$28.9 billion. This amount is \$1.3 billion more than the authorization provided in H. R. 3694, the House-passed version of the bill.

Both the House and Senate measures are intended to restore funds anticipated to be lost due to the first ever negative calculation of Revenue Aligned Budget Authority, a TEA 21 mechanism that requires that highway program spending match estimated revenues in the Highway Account of the Highway Trust Fund. The Treasury Department estimates that for FY 2003, the RABA calculation will require a reduction of highway program funding some \$8.6 billion below the FY 2002 spending level. The House measure would restore funding to the amount authorized for FY 2003 in TEA 21. The Senate measure would provide that funding plus an additional \$1.3 billion. Both the House and Senate bills include language to require that the restored funds be distributed according to the formulas established in TEA 21.

The Senate bill would provide Texas \$1.989 billion in FY 2003 highway funding, compared to the \$1.614 billion estimated in the President's budget. This would restore approximately \$375 million of the estimated \$600 million in Texas highway funds anticipated to be cut due to the negative RABA calculation for FY 2003.

It is uncertain whether the Senate committee bill will come to the full Senate for consideration on its own or as an amendment to the FY 2002 Supplemental Appropriations bill now being debated. Stay tuned.

The *Federal Flyer* is a publication of the TxDOT Legislative Affairs Office. It is intended to provide up-to-date information on major legislative activities in the 107th Congress for the management of the Texas Department of Transportation, state leaders, and others interested in Texas transportation issues. This report will also feature key activities in the national transportation community. Sources include news services and staff reports.

Coby Chase, Director of Legislative Affairs, serves as publisher and can be reached at (512) 463-6086. The department's federal legislative analysts are Joe Guzzo (202-638-3927), Tonia Norman Ramirez (512-463-9957), and David Soileau (512-463-6081). Please contact any of the staff for information on federal transportation and legislative issues. To subscribe to the *Federal Flyer* by e-mail, please send your request to tramirez@dot.state.tx.us.

This publication will be filed with the State Publications Clearinghouse in the State Library in accordance with the Texas State Depository Law.

